

UNCOVER THE PRISON IN YOUR BACKYARD



Event Dates: Wednesday, January 9, 2013 - 7:30pm
Wednesday, February 13, 2013 - 7:30pm
Wednesday, March 13, 2013 - 7:30pm
Wednesday, April 10, 2013 - 7:30pm
Wednesday, May 8, 2013 - 7:30pm
Price: FREE
Venue: W-16 - McGuireWoods Gallery

This new lecture series will chronicle the story of the Workhouse from the Progressive movement of the late 1800's and its emphasis on rehabilitation, through the social upheaval and international turmoil of the 1960's, to the political and community battles that lead to the facility's closing.

Presented by the Workhouse Prison Museum, this series will address issues, personages and dynamics that reached far beyond the environs of the sprawling 3,000 acre complex known interchangeably as the DC/Lorton/Occoquan prison.

January 9, 2013: Genesis of a Prison. A talk given by Dr. Robyn Muncy, Associate Professor of History, University of Maryland who will discuss the Progressive movement's approach to crime and punishment and its effect on the creation of the Workhouse. Supervisory Gerry Hyland, who was involved with the closing of the prison, will make opening remarks.

February 13, 2013: Life Behind Bars features a panel of former inmates who will depict life at the Workhouse. The discussion will be moderated by , retired prison chaplain Dr. Elwood Gray.

March 13, 2013: Working Behind Bars. A panel of former correctional officers, moderated by retired Director of DC Department of Corrections Walter Ridley, will provide their view of working at the former Workhouse.

April 10, 2013: Years of Turmoil. Civil rights attorneys Philip Hirschkop and Marvin Miller will recount legal battles that reflected the enormous social changes that exploded into America's culture in the 1960's. Paul Quander, DC Deputy Mayor for Public Services, will provide a view of the impact of these changes on the prison.

May 8, 2013: Out of the Ashes. Former Congressman Tom Davis and retired Director of DC Department of Corrections Walter Ridley will address the political forces and events that resulted in the closing of the facility and its transfer to Fairfax County. Supervisor Gerry Hyland will introduce the closing lecture.

Lectures are the second Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm in the McGuireWoods Gallery at the Workhouse. The Workhouse Prison Museum will be open special hours from 6-7:15pm before each lecture for attendees.

ABOUT THE WORKHOUSE ARTS CENTER

Workhouse Prison to Workhouse Arts Center

The story of the Lorton Workhouse began just over 100 years ago at the turn of the twentieth century. At the instigation of President Theodore Roosevelt, in 1908 a special three-member Penal Commission was appointed to investigate the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at the District of Columbia jail and workhouse. The Progressive-era reform movement advocated training prisoners for a trade to enable them to obtain employment following their release, making prisons self-supporting through use of prison labor and providing a wholesome and uplifting environment.

The Committee recommended, and Congress approved, the purchase of a 1,155- acre tract north of the Occoquan River that was acquired in 1910. When the first 29 prisoners arrived by barge in the summer of 1910 from the District of

Columbia, they were housed in tents on the Occoquan River. The first buildings were made of wood cut and built by the prisoners. The wooden buildings were gradually replaced during the 1920s by the Colonial Revival buildings on the site today. The prisoners made the bricks, fired them in kilns on the nearby river and built the dormitories, mess hall and administration buildings. A Women's Workhouse, also made of wood, opened nearby in June 1912 to accommodate about 100 prisoners.

The Workhouse developed into an agricultural work camp. It was intended to be self sufficient and over time developed extensive agricultural operations, including cultivated fields, pasture land, an orchard and cannery, a poultry farm, hog ranch, slaughterhouse, dairy, blacksmith shop, sawmill; and feed, hay and storage barns. The first prisoners at the Workhouse were misdemeanants—men who has been arrested and jailed for public drunkenness, petty theft, simple assault and non-support. Women were sentenced for solicitation, prostitution, disorderly conduct, vagrancy and intoxication. Beginning in July 1917 and continuing until November 1917, 72 members of the National Women's Party were incarcerated at the Workhouse for protests over voting rights for women, including one of the movement's founders, Lucy Burns.

During the ninety-some years the District of Columbia's Correctional Complex was operational, the area in use increased to over 3200 acres. In addition to the Workhouse, a Reformatory, Penitentiary and Youth Center were built on the property. The Workhouse officially closed in February 1968. The majority of the buildings were turned over to the D.C. Department of Public Health for an Alcoholic Rehabilitation Center. In 1983 the Alcoholic Rehabilitation Center was closed, fences and guard towers were built and the buildings were again used as a medium-security prison. By the late 1980s, the prison was known more for over-crowding and disorganization than the rehabilitation program Roosevelt had wished for. In fact, the prison was in such a state of disrepair that it became representative of the nation's difficulties with correctional facilities. In 1997, Federal legislation was passed requiring the Lorton Correctional Facility to be closed by December 31, 2001. The last prisoner left Lorton in November 2001.

After the Lorton Correctional Complex closed, 2324 acres were sold to Fairfax County, Virginia in 2002 for 4.2 million dollars. The County undertook a comprehensive adaptive re-use study for this prime location. In 2002 the Lorton Arts Foundation put forward a plan to transform the former prison facility into a cultural arts center and, in July 2004, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approved the rezoning of a 55-acre portion of the former correctional facility to become the Workhouse Arts Center. In 2005, the site was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. After several years of planning, adaptive reuse and rehabilitation of the historic buildings, the Workhouse Arts Center, a project of the Lorton Arts Foundation, opened to the public in September 2008.

The Workhouse currently consists of seven (7) artist studio buildings, the main galleries and the recently opened Youth Arts Center. We support more than 100 professional and emerging artists, providing them affordable studios and galleries in which to exhibit their work. As opposed to most passive arts experiences, visitors are encouraged to interact with the artists when they visit. In addition to visual arts, the Workhouse Arts Center is home to performing arts, including theater, film Institute, musical and dance performances. The Education Department supports both the visual and performing arts, offering over 150 classes and workshops each quarter, in a broad spectrum of art disciplines.

Future plans for the Workhouse include a 900-person Event Center, a 1000-seat amphitheater, 300-seat Workhouse Theatre, restaurants, apartments, Music Barn and garden/horticultural area. Several other buildings on the site, yet to be renovated, may provide for other activities such as a Visitors Center, a blacksmith shop, theatre scene shops and rehearsal space, among other possibilities.

The Lorton Arts Foundation has established, in the Workhouse, the region's most distinctive cultural arts center. When all phases of the renovation are complete, the Workhouse Arts Center will consist of 234,000 square feet of adaptively reused buildings and 60,000 square feet in new construction and the site will include 40 acres of open space. The Workhouse Arts Center's crucial role in the cultural development of Fairfax County is clear to all who visit, finally fulfilling the prison's original intention to provide a peaceful and positive environment for all.

WorkhouseArts.org